DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 208 982 PS 012 500

AUTHOR Allen, Mary J.; Friedle, James
TITLE Guilt and Anxiety in Mothers with Young Children.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Meeting of the Western Psychological Association (Los Angeles, CA, April 9-12, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Anxiety; Attitude Measures; Day Care; Employed Women; *Employment Level; *Marital Status; Mother Attitudes; *Mothers; One Parent Family; Parent Child Relationship; Personality; *Preschool Children
IDENTIFIERS *Guilt; *Traditionalism

ABSTRACT

Guilt and anxiety in mothers of preschool children as a function of marital and career status, child care arrangements, and traditionalism were studied in a sample of 51 non-student women. The sample comprised four major groups: Group One mothers had an intact marriage and were at home with their children; Group Two mothers had an intact marriage, were not employed, and their children were at nursery school; Group Three mothers had intact marriages, were employed, and their children were enrolled in nursery school; and Group Four mothers were single, working, and their children were in nursery school. It was hypothesized that guilt and anxiety would be most strongly found among traditional women with children in nursery school. Each mother filled out a questionnaire that measured (1) conservation of temperament and radicalism; (2) "untroubled adequacy" and guilt proneness, and (3) maternal guilt concerning the quantity of interaction with their preschool children. The major hypothesis was not confirmed. However, Group One mothers exhibited the least amount of guilt and anxiety and Group Four mothers the most amount of guilt and anxiety. Results suggest the need for a support network among single working mothers. (Author/RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED208982

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

GUILT AND ANXIETY IN MOTHERS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Mary J. Allen and James Friedle

California State College, Bakersfield

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Mary J. Allen
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 012500

In traditional American families, parents have distinct roles, with the father as the career-oriented breadwinner and the mother as stay-at-home housewife/homemaker. Traditional values rewarded parents for performing their roles well and frowned upon men who would not support their families and women who deserted their children to develop careers. Over the last two decades, norms have changed in response to economic pressures from spiraling inflation and industry's needs for service personnel and to social pressures from women's groups and expectations of a high standard of living by middle class Americans. The single-parent family and dual-career family have become more common and more socially acceptable. One out of six American children and one out of ten children under age six were in single parent homes in 1975 ("The Parent Gap," 1975). The U. S. Department of Labor (1978) reports that the majority of children under 18 years of age (51%) have mothers who work, so that the full-time housewife is now in the minority.

Although norms have changed to tolerate (or even reward) working mothers, traditional values may continue to make working women feel guilt and anxiety over their reduced parenting role. Hyde and Rosenberg (1980), reviewing the literature, conclude that working women suffer from a double bind, the "work-mother incompatibility," that states that it is desirable for mothers to bring home an income, but that working

women cannot be good mothers, especially to young children. One group of women who may escape this double bind is the non-traditional woman, who has less traditional, conservative values.

Hoffman (1974), reviewing the research on working mothers, concluded that their children did not suffer emotionally or intellectually and tend to develop independence earlier because they are not "over-parented." Daughters of working mothers are exposed to a different maternal role model than daughters of full-time housewifes, which may benefit their self-concepts and career goals. Hoffman concludes that the effects of maternal employment may depend upon the mother's psychological state, such as her self-concept and attitudes toward working. If she is in a double bind, exhausted from working two full-time jobs (career plus housewife roles), and feeling discouraged because she cannot be a superwoman who is perfect in both roles, anxiety, depression, and guilt may haunt the working mother. Etaugh (1980), reviewing the literature, concurs with this conclusion. Mothers with more positive attitudes about their own work tend to have better adjusted children, so that society's ambiguous attitudes toward working mothers may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of frustrated mothers and maladjusted children. Movements toward egalitarian marriages (e.g., Bem & Bem, 1970) and androgynous sex roles (e.g., Bem, 1975) reflect attempts by women and men to develop new family patterns and expectations that relieve working women of some of this stress.

A more practical response to the working mother is the development of day care centers for their children. A good nursery school that provides for the emotional, intellectual, and physical needs of the children should relieve working mothers of the guilt and anxiety they

may experience. Etaugh (1980), after reviewing the literature on non-maternal day care, concluded that "high quality nonmaternal care does not appear to have harmful effects on the preschooler child's maternal attachment, intellectual development, social-emotional behavior, or physical health" (p. 313). However, Etaugh concluded that the popular press has tended to perpetuate traditional attitudes toward motherhood, perhaps negating the positive effects of good child-care arrangements.

The present study examines guilt and anxiety in mothers of preschool children as a function of marital and career status, child care arrangements, and traditionalism. It was anticipated that guilt and anxiety would be most strongly found among traditional women with children in nursery school.

Method

Fifty-one non-student mothers of preschool age children were recruited in several ways. Thirty of the mothers volunteered through requests made at community nursery schools. Twenty-one mothers who were housewives with intact marriages and preschool children at home were recruited through friends and acquaintances of the researchers. The subjects formed four major groups:

1. Intact marriage, mother at home with children (n = 21).

2. Intact marriage, mother does not work, children at nursery school (n = 7).

3. Intact marriage, mother works, children in nursery school (n = 13).

4. Single working mother, children in nursery school (n = 10).

Each mother filled out a questionnaire that included scales Q_1 and O of the Sixteen PF (Forms A and B; Cattel, 1979), the IPAT Anxiety Scale Questionnaire (ASQ; Cattel & Scheier, 1963), and five items designed for this study to measure maternal guilt (concerning the quantity of interaction with the preschool child(ren).) Scale Q_1 measures Conservation of Temperament-Radicalism; Scale O measures Untroubled Adequacy-Guilt Proneness. The Maternal Guilt scale ranged from 0 to 10, with intermediate ("uncertain") responses contributing one point and "yes" responses contributing two points for each question.

Results

Scale Q_1 was dichotomized at Cattel's median (6.50 for sten scores), and three two-way ANOVA's were calculated with Group (Groups 1 to 4 above) and Traditionalism as independent variables and Guilt Proneness (Scale 0), Anxiety (ASQ), and Maternal Guilt as the dependent variables. Each ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for Group: $F(3, 43) = 12.77$, $p < .001$ for Guilt Proneness, $F(3,43) = 7.25$, $p < .001$ for Anxiety, and $F(3, 43) = 6.29$, $p < .005$ for Maternal Guilt. There were not significant main effects nor interactions involving Traditionalism. Means and standard deviations for each group are given in Table 1. Scheffe contrasts comparing Group 1 to the combined Groups 2, 3, and 4 were significant for each of the three dependent variables, $F = 27.18$ for Guilt Proneness, 18.23 for Anxiety, and 18.62 for Maternal Guilt, each $p < .01$. The rank ordering of the groups were the same for each variable: 1, 3, 2, 4, with Group 1 (married women at home with their

children) the least guilty and anxious, and Group 4 (working single women) the most guilty and anxious. Pairwise Scheffe contrasts revealed that Groups 1 and 4 were significantly different on each of the three dependent variables, $F = 37.55$ for Guilt Proneness, 16.72 for Anxiety, and 16.64 for Maternal Guilt, each $p < .01$. Groups 1 and 2 were significantly different on Anxiety, $F = 9.76$, $p < .05$. Groups 3 and 4 were significantly different on Guilt Proneness ($F = 15.29$, $p < .01$) and Maternal Guilt ($F = 13.88$, $p < .01$). Other pairwise contrasts were not significant.

Discussion

It was hypothesized that traditional women would experience the most guilt and anxiety over leaving their children in nursery school. This was not confirmed. The effects of group membership were the same for all women, regardless of their tendency toward traditional or radical values. One major conclusion that could be drawn is that mothers of young children who do not attend nursery school have less guilt proneness, anxiety, and maternal guilt than mothers whose preschoolers attend school. However, comparisons between pairs of groups revealed that mothers who stay home and working mothers with intact families did not differ on any of the three dependent variables. The group that expressed the most guilt and anxiety and who were most unlike the housewives were single working mothers. These women are the least likely to benefit from trends toward androgynous life styles and egalitarian relationships and bear the burden of being the sole parent to their children.

The married housewives with children in school had more anxiety than housewives with their children at home and, because of their moderate scores, did not otherwise significantly differ from the other three groups. Their moderate scores and the consistent rank ordering of the three dependent variables across groups suggest that working mothers feel more at ease than nonworking women with their children in day-care centers, perhaps since they have a socially approved reason for not staying at home with their offspring.

Results do not support Hyde and Rosenberg's "work-mother incompatibility" notion, at least for married women. It appears that married working women with good child-care arrangements are comfortable with their dual roles. Results also suggest the need for a support network among single working mothers to help relieve them of their guilt proneness, anxiety, and maternal guilt.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations
for Groups on the Three Dependent Variables

	GROUP			
Variable	Married Mother at Home (n = 21)	Married Mother Home. Children in School (n = 7)	Married Mother Works, Children in School (n = 13)	Working Single Mother, Children in School (n = 10)
Guilt Proneness (Scale O)	7.14(3.15)	11.00(3.70)	9.69(4.11)	15.60(3.72)
Anxiety (ASQ)	21.24(7.82)	34.14(9.94)	25.54(12.67)	36.10(7.92)
Maternal Guilt	3.76(3.24)	6.71(3.35)	6.31(2.69)	8.40(2.27)

References

Bem, S. L. Sex role adaptability: One consequence of psychological androgyny. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1977, 31, 634-643.

Bem, S. L., & Bem, D. J. Case study of non-conscious ideology: Training the woman to know her place. In D. J. Bem (Ed.), Beliefs, attitudes, and human affairs. Belmont, California: Brooks/Cole, 1970.

Cattell, R. B. Handbook for the Sixteen PF. Champaign, Illinois: Institute for Personality and Ability Testing, 1970.

Cattel, R. B., & Scheier, I. H. Handbook for the IPAT Anxiety Scale Questionnaire. Champaign, Illinois: Institute for Personality and Ability Testing, 1963.

Etaugh, C. Effects of nonmaternal care on children: Research evidence and popular views. American Psychologist, 1980, 35, 309-319.

Hoffman, L. The employment of women, education, and fertility. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 1974, 20, 99-119.

Hyde, J. S., & Rosenberg, B. G. Half the human experience: The psychology of women (2nd ed.). Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Company, 1980.

The Parent Gap. Newsweek, September 22, 1975, pp. 48-56.